

✓ Chevalier Charles Oberthür was born at Munich (Bavaria) where his father had a manufactory of music strings, one of five sons, he is the only one still living, all his brothers having died in early youth, the subject of this biography evinced very early musical talent, and his parents did all they could to encourage its cultivation, in compliance with his mother's wish, he first began to study the piano, but as his father considered, that there were even then, already too many pianists, he at his parents' wish took up the study of the Harp, which at that time, was especially in Germany a very rare instrument, and on account of this, it was difficult to find good instruction on that instrument for him, however this difficulty was overcome, by placing him under the care of the late Mad<sup>me</sup> Elise Brauchle, at that time Court Harpist, who most conscientiously guided his studies, and became proud of the success her pupil attained in after life. Consequently a lasting friendship and mutual regard existed between teacher and pupil, kept up through correspondence till the death of the former, only a few years ago. Also when Oberthür during his travels came to Munich, he never missed paying his respects to his former and first teacher. Returning to the time of his early studies, he attended them most earnestly, so that he was able, when scarcely twelve years of age, to play already at a public concert, in Munich, the piece chosen, was Naderman's Trio for Harp and two Horns. Soon after that he had also the honour to play at the Court of the Dowager Queen Caroline in Munich, to whom sometime afterwards he had also the honour of dedicating his first book of songs, published at Munich. About this time he had the misfortune to lose his father, which grievous loss he felt very deeply, and which naturally also greatly influenced his future prospects. However through the exertions of his kind mother, he was enabled to study composition under Musik Director G. V. Röder, a most distinguished composer and learned contrapunctist, whose masses and also the Oratorium "The Messiah" and Cantata "Cecilia"



Y Chevalier Charles Oberthür was born at Munich (Bavaria) where his father had a manufactory of music strings, one of five sons, he is the only one still living, all his brothers having died in early youth, the subject of this biography evinced very early musical talent, and his parents did all they could to encourage its cultivation, in compliance with his mother's wish, he first began to study the piano, but as his father considered, that there were even then, already too many pianists, he at his parents wish took up the study of the Harp, which at that time, was especially in Germany a very rare instrument, and on account of this, it was difficult to find good instruction on that instrument for him, however this difficulty was overcome, by placing him under the care of the late Mad<sup>me</sup> Elise Brauchle, at that time Court Harpist, who most conscientiously guided his studies, and became proud of the success her pupil attained in after life. Consequently a lasting friendship and mutual regard existed between teacher and pupil, kept up through correspondence till the death of the former, only a few years ago. Also when Oberthür during his travels came to Munich, he never missed paying his respects to his former and first teacher. Returning to the time of his early studies, he attended them most earnestly, so that he was able, when scarcely twelve years of age, to play already at a public concert, in Munich, the piece chosen, was Naderman's Trio for Harp and two Horns. Soon after that he had also the honour to play at the Court of the Dowager Queen Caroline in Munich, for whom sometime afterwards he had also the honour of dedicating his first book of songs, published at Munich. About this time he had the misfortune to lose his father, which grievous loss he felt very deeply, and which naturally also greatly influenced his future prospects. However through the exertions of his kind mother, he was enabled to study composition under Musik Director G. V. Röder, a most distinguished composer and learned contrapunctist, whose masses and also the Pratorium "The Messiah" and Cantata "Cecilia"



Returned in the Autumn of the next year again to Wiesbaden where Oberthür again took up his former position at the Ducal Opera house, playing frequently at concerts in Wiesbaden, Frankfurt, Mayence, and elsewhere, besides which he occupied himself also much with composition, and it was about this time that his Opera "Flores de Namür" was written, which was repeatedly performed at the Ducal Court Theatre, honoured by the presence of the Duchess Pauline, at whose court he also played, and received the title of Harpist to Her Royal Highness. Having given up the engagement at the Theatre, Oberthür was alternately living privately at Wiesbaden and Biebrich, but during the London season, spending a few months in England. It was however at the beginning of 1852 that he with his wife took their permanent residence in London, where he had many pupils belonging to the aristocracy, and where Her Grace the Duchess of Wellington became one of his chief patronesses. About this time there was a movement set on foot by ~~professional~~ <sup>and</sup> professional cliques, against the harp as a solo instrument, which if not counteracted, would have greatly damaged not only the interest of its professors, but also that of the harp makers, it was then that the late Mr. P. Erard induced Oberthür to write several compositions for two, three, and four harps, and it was to this circumstance that his "Duo Brillante" for two harps on the "Huguenots", and also the Nocturne for three harps Op. 111, and the grand National Quartett for four harps owe their existence. They were performed at several Invitation Matinées at the Salle Erard, also at a series of public concerts, and were also commanded by Her Majesty the Queen, to be performed at Buckingham Palace, and have no doubt been instrumental in keeping the interest for ~~for~~ this beautiful & poetical instrument alive, thus averting the intended doom of casting it into oblivion. In the course of the next few years Oberthür played frequently on the Continent, he played also with great success in Paris. In 1864 he received an invitation to play in the principal towns in Holland, namely Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam, The Hague, Leyden, & Arnhem, meeting everywhere with great success, & being frequently recalled. The Society "Sempre Crescendo" in Leyden offered him under great ovations the Diploma of Honorary Member. In January 1865 he played at the Court of Weimar, and also at a grand orchestral Concert at the Theatre, where his reception was a most brilliant one. At Cologne Ferdinand Hiller gave a musical Matinée in his honour, where he made the acquaintance of



The late professor Bischoff, who as a great authority in musical matters, recommended Oberthür most warmly to the Directors of the conservative concerts, <sup>in Prague</sup> at the Laudes Theatre, where he played his concertino with Orchestra Op. 175, with such great success, as to be three times recalled, also the bohemian press were unanimous in speaking in the highest terms of his talent, while at Prague he was much sought after, and played at several of the Nobilities' houses, as the Grand Duchess of Oldenburg, and Prince Fürstenberg. He also had the honour to play before the Emperor Ferdinand at the Bratschin, and was probably the last artist, who performed before his Majesty, who then was already far advanced in years. It may be mentioned here that before the performance at the Bratschin began, Oberthür was told that he must not feel surprised if His Majesty on account of his great age, should fall asleep, before the programme was gone through, however His Majesty did not fall asleep, but on the contrary requested that the programme should be prolonged, by several pieces, and afterwards spoke himself most kindly to the artist, present at this imperial Matinee were, Her Majesty, the Empress, the Comtesse de Chambord, the Duke of Modena, and the Imperial Suite of His Majesty. Before leaving Prague, Oberthür was presented, by the Society of Art in Bohemia, with the Diploma of honorary member. \*) In 1870 Oberthür made an extended tour, through France, and Germany, playing at Calais, Lille, at the Courts of Meiningen and Altenburg, at Dresden, Magdeburg, Nürnberg, Passau, Katisbon, and at several concerts in Nordhausen, at the latter place, a banquet was given in his honour, at which occasion President Seiffart brought out a toast, of which the following is a translation by Leopold Wray.

The Harp we learn from Bible lore,  
Was loved and prized in days of yore;  
And little David swept its strings  
To drive Saul's darker thoughts away.  
For music sweet oblivion brings,  
And stormy passions both allay.  
And when in turn become a King  
Still to his harp would David cling,  
Loving to sing with harp and choir  
The grand old psalms God's works inspire  
And ever since those palmy days  
The harp awakes undying praise  
Though in our times its thrilling strings  
Are struck no more by hands of Kings  
For 'tis an art not lightly learned  
Whole laurels are more slowly earned

\*) In January 1869 he went to Berlin, & on the birthday of the eldest son of the Crown Prince & Princess (the present Emperor of Germany, Wilhelm II) he had the honour to play before their Royal Highnesses at a Matinee, which took place at the Crown Prince's Palace, where their Royal Highnesses expressed repeatedly their great satisfaction & listened with evident interest.



2/  
Than those which whiskered heroes claim,  
Who during peace at soldiers play,  
Hence in all times 'twas seldom fame  
Awaited on a minstrel's name,  
And rarer still from day to day,  
It grew, King David's match to find,  
Who all his glorious gifts combined.  
But now at length, in these our days  
A miracle stalks through the land,  
A real harper claims our praise.  
Who with a brightly master's hand  
Strikes powerful chords, which at his will  
Our senses like the organ thrill,  
Anon breathes music of the spheres  
Or siren's voice that melts in tears;  
Next waft us to some fairy dance,  
Where merry elves in circles prance,  
While Luthers stirring hymns of praise  
Pierces at intervals the maze  
Of sounds; and ever and anon  
Lights the sweet horn of Oberon.  
Such from thy harp the tones that flow,  
Making our hearts with rapture glow  
And soar aloft in ecstasy  
On wings of joy to follow thee.

Oh minstrel, by what magic power  
Hast thou wrought wonders such as these  
Our warmest thanks on thee we shower,  
A world of gratitude to ease;  
One vast hurrah shall make the welkin ring  
And loud proclaim  
The honoured name  
Of Oberthür, of harpers all, the King.

As in the course of the same year, the Franco-German war broke out, travelling abroad was of course out of the question, however as in the following year, the Germans being victorious, there was as far as the Fatherland was concerned, fresh impulse given to peaceful arts, thus the enterprising impresario Hellman, arranged a grand concert tour through Germany, under the title of "Artists Concerts" for which he offered Oberthür the engagement as Solo Harpist, these concerts



began in Breslau on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of Oct. 1871, and after a most successful tour through the principal German towns, finished at Munich, about the middle of December. The other artists engaged for these concerts, were, Marie Monbelli, Bernaroline Hamakers, Anna Mehlig, Carl Hill, Nicolini, Sivori, Grützmacher, J. Becker's Florentine Quartett, and Rich.<sup>d</sup> Metzdorff, (conductor). In January 1873 Oberthür gave a concert at Munich where his Trio in C. maj. for harp, violin, and violoncello, was produced, & likewise his Nocturne, for three harps, both works pleasing immensely. During the summer months Oberthür was also frequently heard at the German watering places, where he gave concerts in conjunction with the celebrated Pianiste Madame Arabella Goddard, Fräulein Natalie Carola (a distinguished singer) and others, at Wiesbaden, Hornburg, Kreuznach, Hissingen, Ems etc. In March 1875 he was again summoned to Prague, where he played Parish Alvars' Concerto in E. b. with Orchestra. In January 1876 he found himself in Vienna where he played at a concert of the "Artists Society", and gave a concert at Musikvereins Saal, playing his grand Trio in F minor, assisted by Concertmeister Helmesberger and Hilpert, from there he went to Hamburg, played his Concertino at a grand orchestral concert and gave a Matinée, where again his Trio in F min. was performed, besides other pieces, receiving also an invitation from the, Gontünster Verein, where he played one of Spohr's Sonatas with violin and several of his own compositions. Later on he played at a grand concert at Aix la Chappelle, where his Concertino with Orchestra, and "Loreley" a legend for Orchestra, with harp obligato achieved great success. In January the same year he played also at a concert of the Cäcilia Society in Kaiserslautern, where his Trio in C. maj. met with immense success, as equally did his "Concertino" with Orchestra, a few days later at Halle. After that he played at Eggenfelden and Passau. As also in April the same year he was summoned to Dublin to play at a concert of the Philharmonic Society, playing there "Loreley" and his "Duo Brillante" for harp & Piano on Weber's "Oberon".



In August 1880 he played at a grand concert in the Kurhaus in Baden-Baden. In August 1881. He was invited by Her Royal Highness Princess Frederica of Hanover, to assist at a grand Concert for a charitable purpose, given at the historical Great Hall of Hampton Court Palace, and in the winters of 1882 & 1883 he spent some time in Paris, giving on both occasions concerts in the Salle Erard, where both his Trios for harp, Violin & violoncello, were most successfully performed, and of which the French press spoke in the highest terms. In the course of the latter year, he had also the honour to dedicate some of his pieces to Her Majesty the Queen of the Belgians, who herself is an excellent performer on the harp, & passionately fond of that instrument, in consequence of which he received the following letter:

Cabinet du Roi, Palais de Bruxelles  
Le 3 Février, 1883

Monsieur, La Reine a reçu les deux exemplaires de vos compositions pour harpe, dédiées à Sa Majesté, que vous Lui avez fait parvenir avec deux exemplaires de vos esquisses intitulées "Gipsy Girl" "Gondolier" et "Blind Girl."

C'est avec grand plaisir que la Reine joue ces charmants morceaux, et je suis chargé de vous transmettre les remerciements de Sa Majesté pour votre aimable attention, et de vous faire parvenir en même temps comme témoignage de Sa bienveillance, un souvenir qui consiste en une épingle que vous trouverez jointe à la présente. Agréez, Monsieur,

de ma considération distinguée  
Le Secrétaire du Roi

Comte Paul de Boschgrave

Monsieur Oberthur

1<sup>er</sup> Professeur de la harpe à l'Académie de Musique à Londres

The above named souvenir of Her Majesty the Queen of the Belgians consisted of a breast pin in the form of a harp, studded all around with brilliant, the pieces mentioned as "Gipsy Girl" "Gondolier" & "Blind Girl" were dedicated to Her



Her Majesty's daughter, Princess Stephanie, then Crown Princess  
of Austria. In 1884 Oberthur was honoured by Her Royal  
Highness the Crown Princess Victoria of Germany in  
accepting the dedication of his orchestral Prelude "Shakespeare"  
which was published by the firm of Czanz in Vienna  
and which was performed in the winter following at  
the Crownprince's Palace in Berlin, frequently also  
at the Concert House in Berlin and other towns.  
In the autumn of 1885 he was invited by his friend  
Mr. Wm. Ash of Holland House, Weston Super Mare, to  
accompany him to America, they sailed there by the  
Cunard Steamer "Aurania", visited New York, Albany,  
the falls of Niagara, Detroit, Cleveland, Washington,  
Philadelphia, Boston etc. At Detroit they were the  
guests of Chevalier J de Zielinski, who since many  
years, has been a personal friend of Oberthur, and  
frequently introduced his compositions at the public  
concerts at Detroit and elsewhere. Although this  
visit to America had no professional object, Oberthur  
was nevertheless heard, there at several places, his  
friend Zielinski found a harp for <sup>him</sup> at Detroit  
and arranged several soirees at his own & other  
houses, in order to give him the opportunity to  
be heard. On one such occasion his Trio in C  
was performed, assisted by two renowned artists  
Mr. Becker (violin) & Mr. Heidler (Vllo), also his  
concertino was performed on these occasions, where he  
had the advantage of Chev. Zielinski's piano accomp.  
That gentleman who now lives at Buffalo, being  
well known as a distinguished pianist.  
After returning on the homeward journey to New  
York, the family of the celebrated Harpiste Miss  
Maud Morgan, whose acquaintance he made the  
previous year in London, most kindly arranged  
for him a "Matinee d'Invitation" at Chickering  
Hall, where he played several of his compositions  
amongst others also the concertino, this time accompanied  
on the organ by Mr. G. Morgan, Miss Morgan's father  
who is too well known, as a first rate organist  
as to it's being necessary to say that the combined



3/  
performance was a most perfect one, altogether  
the New York press reported about this machine in  
the most flattering terms. In January next year  
Oberthür was invited by Her Majesty the Queen of the  
Belgians to the Chateau de Laeken, where his  
Impromptu for three harps, written expressly for  
Her Majesty, was performed, the Queen herself  
taking part in it, whilst the other two parts  
were performed by Professor Hasselmanns from  
Paris and the author. In the spring of the same  
year, his Prelude "Shakespeare" was several times  
performed by the Orchestra of the Concert house  
in Berlin, and the following letter of the at that  
time conductor of these concerts, will testify as  
to its success.

Dear Sir

Having the honour to send you the enclosed  
programmes, it affords me great pleasure  
to mention that your composition has met with  
the greatest success, and therefore, it shall  
certainly remain in my repertoire. With best  
thanks for sending me this beautiful work,  
I remain with sincere respect

yours truly

H Mausfeldt

To Mr. Charles Oberthür Berlin, March 14 1886.  
14 Talbot Road, London.

~~In January 1887 Oberthür~~

In the autumn of the same year, he had the honour  
to play before their Royal Highnesses the Prince and  
Princess Ludwig Ferdinand at Nymphenburg near  
Munich, coming then from Vienna where he was on a  
visit to his friend Zamara (harpsist to His Majesty the  
Emperor of Austria).

In January 1887 Oberthür was again invited by the  
Queen of Belgium to play at the Chateau de Laeken  
where the Impromptu for three harps was again  
performed by Her Majesty, Mons Hasselmanns & the  
author, whilst was again requested, there were solos  
by Messrs Hasselmanns & Oberthür, who with the former



also played his "Duo Brillante" for two harps on the  
Huguenots. Amongst those present at this royal concert  
were, L. A. Royale la Comtesse de Flandres, la Duchesse  
de Limbourg ~~Stierum~~, la Comtesse Vander Straeten,  
Le Duc d'Anmale, Le Prince de Chimay, (ministre  
d'affaires etrangeres) Le Comte Paul de Borchgrave,  
Mons Gevart, (Directeur du Conservatoire) Mons L.  
General Goodahls etc. Towards the end of December  
Oberthür played again at the Château de Lacten, from there  
he proceeded to Gotha, to play on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January  
1888 at a concert of the Musikverein, after this he paid  
a visit to his friends the Baron & Baroness de Böcklin  
at Spandau near Berlin, there the military band played  
in his honour, frequently before his residence, playing an  
effective arrangement of his own "Virgo Maria" and his  
march "Charlemagne". On January the 15<sup>th</sup> he played at a  
Berlin, for the benefit of the "Royal Operahouse" in  
16<sup>th</sup> he played at a concert of the "Mildreda Society," and on the  
Düsseldorf, after this he played at a concert in Aschaffenburg  
On January 22<sup>nd</sup> he played again in Egenfelden, which  
although a small place has particular attractions for him  
as quite near to it is his mother's birthplace, which  
about 12 years previously was almost entirely burnt down,  
soon after that calamity Oberthür gave a concert there, for  
the benefit of its restoration, to which people from near  
& far came, so that the largest available room was  
cramped full, and a handsome sum was raised for the  
object in question. Ever since that time, he was a most  
welcome & honoured guest in that part of the  
country, and also on the present occasion he was received  
at the Railway Station by the Burgomaster & other persons  
of distinction, who accompanied him in triumph to the  
Hotel. On January the 25<sup>th</sup>, we find him in Ratisbon,  
where he gave a concert in the Theatre, on this occasion  
he played his concertino with orchestra, and also his  
Prelude "Shakespeare" was performed, a large laurel wreath  
was presented to him there & then, testifying to the  
success of his performance, which was also acknowledged  
by most flattering reports of the local press, it was at  
that time that in Ratisbon he received a letter from the  
Queen of Belgium's own hand, requesting him to visit



He Château de Laeken again, on his return journey to England, this he did & played again at the Court on February the 7<sup>th</sup>, where his "National Quartett" for four harps was performed by Her Majesty, Mons Hasselmaus, Mons Meerloo (professor at the Brussels Conservatoire) and the author, after which he returned to England. In the autumn of the same year he was created Chevalier of the order of Leopold, by His Majesty the King of Belgium, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1889 he played again at the Château de Laeken, after that he played at three concerts in Nordhausen, at two of which his Cantata "Der Königin Pilgerfahrt" was performed, from there he went to Brunswick where at the concert of the Hofcapelle he played his Concertino, & Parish Alvars' "Fantaisie" op. 35 from there he went to Pforzheim, where the above named Cantata was again performed, & he played with usual success some harp solos. During February the same year he played also at Brighton & Bath, besides playing at a good many concerts in London, where in fact his name appears frequently in the concert programmes, always proving of particular attraction. In May the same year he had the honour to play before Her Majesty Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle, where Her Majesty who is an excellent linguist, addressed him in his own language & expressed herself highly gratified with his performance. Chev. Oberthür has composed over 300 musical works chiefly for the harp, but also many piano pieces, and a number of songs, & concerted vocal pieces, amongst the latter are, three Cantatas for ladies voices, under the titles of "The Pilgrim Queen" "The Red Cross Knight" & "Lady Jane Grey" all of which have appeared in German editions. His compositions for the harp are great favourites with all harpists, and are published by the best houses in London, Paris, Vienna, Leipzig, Mayence, Berlin, New York etc. Amongst his most effective pieces, may be named "A Fairy Legend" and his Elegie "Una lagrima sulla Tomba di Parish Alvars" which by not a less authority than the late J Spohr, was recommended to his own niece Mlle Rosalie Spohr, now Countess de Sauerma, a most distinguished harpist, who frequently played this piece in public. Amongst his greater works may be mentioned his Trio for Harp, Violin & Vcllo, in C, published at Leipzig & dedicated to Her Majesty the Queen of Belgium, & also his concertstück for Harp & Orchestra "Orpheus" & his Trio in F minor, published by Schott at Mayence, and dedicated to Her Imperial Highness the Princess of Thurn



& Taxis at Ratisbon, as likewise his composition "Loreley" a legend for orchestra with harp obligato, dedicated to His Royal Highness The Prince Regent, Leopold of Bavaria, published by Louis Bertel (Hanover), & it must not be omitted to mention, that several of his orchestral works have frequently appeared in the best concert programmes, in particular his Overtures "Macbeth" "Rübezahl" and the Prelude "Shakespeare". In conclusion we may also say that his compositions & playing have on several occasions been commented on through poetry, of which some specimens may follow here.

To Charles Oberthür

Sweet Harpist of Nassau, what listening ears,  
For ever surround thee, what smiles and what tears,  
Have birth when the heavenly spiritual sounds  
Awake from thy harp, without measures or bounds  
The homage of Nobles, thou often dost gain  
A Queen has in rapture applauded thy strain  
The bright eyes of beauties still brighter have shone  
When thy harp has yielded its most soothing tone  
But dearer than homage of Nobles or Queen  
The voice of thy loved absent wife would have been  
When only the name that she murmured was thine  
While distant from thee, near her beautiful Rhine  
Louisa Emily Hanbury. Aug. 11<sup>th</sup> 1864.

Joyfully we gather here  
The concert o'er, crowned with success  
Our hearts do swell with happiness  
This day will oft return with memories dear  
Symphony and Overture  
Oft & oft have here been played  
But never heard an "Oberthür"  
Whose lovely tones our ears assailed  
Applause rang forth from every side  
And like a voice, it seemed to say,  
Oh mighty Master, our thanks are thine  
Three cheers we give, Hip, Hip, Hurrah.  
(Free translation of a toast given at a banquet  
at Weimar by the members of the grand ducal  
court chapel, after a concert at the Theatre on the  
30<sup>th</sup> of January 1865.



4  
Accept O Master these sweet flowers,  
Which thy friends here offer thee  
May Fortuna always with you be  
Grant you her gifts in richest showers;  
Wilhelmine Mengelbier  
Aix la Chappelle 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1846.

To the Harp.

Whence are those tender tones I hear,  
That lull to rest, this soul of mine?  
Some vocal Memnon seemeth near,  
Which proves a soothing Anodyne.

Is it the gentle murmuring sea  
Which breaks so calmly on the sand?  
Or sparkling wavelets in their glee  
When rippling backwards from the Strand!

Is it Undines cheerful voice  
Ascending through the curling waves?  
Whilst she, beneath with nymphs rejoice  
In singing songs, mid crystal caves

These dulcet strains, oh harp are thine  
Echoes of those, above the sky  
For harps are instruments divine  
Whose cadences can never die.

The wave of sound thus rolling on  
From World to World through boundless space  
Leaves its sweet influence upon  
Each Astral, in its joyous race

The Telephonic tones reveal  
The hidden mysteries of years,  
And science seeks not to conceal  
The perfect "Music of the Spheres"

Oh Harp sublime, how great thy power  
"Inspired" the hands that handle thee  
Tender emotions from thy tower  
And harmonize in melody.

The Mavis sits with quivering wing  
And gushing song of ardent praise  
He pausing, flies to pluck and bring  
An offering of Laurel sprays.

Jane Caroline Cross - April 19<sup>th</sup> 1880.